



School of Nursing and Midwifery Studies

MSc NURSING STUDIES (GERMANY)

From pattern appraisal to unitary appreciative inquiry

***A critical reflection on the development of
the unitary appreciative inquiry method***

Summative Assessment of the Core Module

„Theoretical Developments in the Science and Art of Nursing“

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to place Cowling's unitary appreciative inquiry method in the context of nursing science and the development of unique nursing research methods. Unitary appreciative inquiry is one of a few nursing research and practice methodologies based on Martha Rogers' theory, the Science of Unitary Human Beings. This article is reflecting the development of the unitary appreciative inquiry method in analyzing articles and literature published by Cowling and other authors that are related to Cowling's ideas and approaches. A brief overview of the basic concepts, assumptions and principles of Rogers' theory is given as well as some insights on other major influences on Cowling's work. The changes that have been made over the past seventeen years from pattern appraisal to pattern appreciation and unitary appreciative inquiry in its current use are mapped and its contribution to current nursing knowledge and practice is critically reviewed. The author of this article strongly believes that nursing needs to develop its own research methods based on nursing theories for further development and improvement of nursing science as an independent and accepted discipline in human health care. It is from that perspective that Cowling's work is reviewed.

Key words: Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings, pattern appreciation, unitary appreciative inquiry, unique nursing research methods

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Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings

Before looking at the development of Cowling's method, it is necessary to know the basic concepts, assumptions and principles of Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings (SUHB), as Cowling uses it as the main orientation for his method.

Rogers (1990) describes nursing as a science and an art and the purpose of nurses "to promote health and well being for all persons wherever they are" (p.6). Science is seen as "a body of abstract knowledge" (p.6). In conclusion "the art of nursing is the creative use of the science of nursing for human betterment" (p.6). The SUHB focuses primarily on energy fields. Human field and environmental field are the two identified energy fields and they are infinite and pandimensional (Rogers, 1992). Pandimensional (formerly titled four-dimensional and multidimensional), is defined as "a non-linear domain without spatial or temporal attributes" (p.29).

Energy fields build an irreducible whole and are in continuous motion. This constant change finds its expression in the principles of homeodynamics. Rogers (1990) describes three principles of homeodynamics which are meant to provide guidance to nursing practice: The principle of resonancy means the continuous change from patterns in human and environmental fields, the principle of helicy is the continuous diversity of human and environmental field patterns, a diversity which is innovative and unpredictable, the principle of integrality is about the continuous mutual process of the two energy fields, the human and environmental field.

In the SUHB pattern is a key term; "an abstraction that reveals itself through its manifestations" (Rogers, 1990, p.9). Each pattern is unique. A human field pattern cannot be separated from its own environmental field pattern (Cowling, 2000). Psychological, physiological, spiritual or other phenomena have significance as manifestations of the whole (Cowling, 1990).

Focus on pattern represents a shift to a higher dimension, which includes and transcends previous nursing knowledge. (Newman, 2002, p.2)

The study of Rogers' SUHB leads to seeing the world from a new perspective which is quite different from a biological, medical, sociological, psychological or any other scientific approach or point of view. However the SUHB does not, and neither does Cowling in his work, exclude knowledge from other sciences and disciplines. The SUHB includes and transcends the various realms into a dynamic pattern of the whole (Newman, 2002). Nursing science from a Rogerian perspective therefore seems more comprehensive as other scientific approaches to nursing.

Nursing is the study of unitary, irreducible, indivisible human and environmental fields: people and their world. (Rogers, 1992, p.29)

Other major influences on Cowling's work, besides the SUHB, are discussed in context of the development of his method, as listed in the next two sections.

From pattern appraisal to unitary appreciative inquiry

For mapping the development of Cowling's unitary appreciative inquiry method, thirteen articles by Cowling from 1990 until 2007 and related articles from other authors have been critically reviewed and included in this and the following section. Cowling uses the theoretical framework of the SUHB to generate his research method. Additionally he puts his work continuously in context with different scientific approaches and refers to other authors, where he finds insights for his own work. Some of the most important influences on his work, besides the SUHB as orientation framework, have been the action research practice methodology of co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001) and the appreciative inquiry in organizational life (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The work of Heron & Reason and its influence on Cowling's method is more differentiated in the next section. Naturally Cowling refers also to the work of other Rogerian scholars like Barrett (1988) or Newman (2002), just to name a few. Cowling always points out the similarities and differences from a unitary perspective, based on the principles of Rogers' SUHB, to other perspectives.

In one article, for example, Cowling (1993) lists the differences between the systems perspective and the unitary perspective in nursing practice and even though he accepts the system perspective as more holistic than classical analytic science, he concludes:

A unitary understanding of human phenomena in practice may lead to more creative approaches in facilitating health. (p.207)

Cowling sees the aim of inquiry based on the concepts of the SUHB in “the appreciation of wholeness, uniqueness, and essence manifested as a singular pattern” (Cowling, 2001, p.33).

In his template for unitary pattern-based nursing practice (Cowling, 1990), the first article critically reviewed for this analysis, Cowling refers to Barrett (1988) and the two phases nursing practice methodology involves; pattern manifestation appraisal and deliberative mutual patterning:

Pattern manifestation appraisal is defined as the continuous process of identifying manifestations of the human and environmental fields that relate to current health events. Deliberative mutual patterning is defined as the continuous process whereby the nurse with the client patterns the environmental field to promote harmony related to the health events. These two phases reflect the mutual movement of change in a particular direction related to specific probabilistic goals as specified by Rogers’ principles. (Barrett, 1988, p.50)

The two phases do not directly reappear in Cowling's further work, but remain, like the SUHB, as part of the orientation framework of his own method. Cowling (1990) proposes a model to guide the development of nursing practice strategies and lists nine constituents of pattern-based practice (p.52-61):

1. *The basic referent of nursing practice is human energy field pattern.*
2. *Human field pattern is appraised through manifestations of the pattern in the form of experience, perception and expressions.*
3. *Pattern appraisal requires an inclusive perspective of what counts as pattern information.*
4. *Knowledge derived from pattern information involves multiple modes of awareness by the nurse.*
5. *Pattern information has meaning for pattern appraisal only when constructed within a unitary context.*
6. *Variant formats for presenting and conveying pattern appraisal are applicative to the unitary perspective.*

7. *The primary source for validating pattern appraisal is the client.*
8. *The basic foundation for intervention is knowing participation in change.*
9. *Evaluation methodologies are focused on continual pattern appraisal and confirmation of alterations with the client.*

Those constituents reappear, partly refined and extended in numbers to ten guiding assumptions, but basically left in its original meaning, in later works of Cowling (1993, 1997). They somehow build the foundation for his method. Cowling (1993) explains experience as the actual happening which “involves sensing and feeling in a natural and unprocessed way” (p.204), while perception “is the making sense of what happens” and is “simultaneous or contiguous with experiencing” (p.204). Expression is seen as “the manifestation of experiencing and perceiving” (p.204).

During further development of the concept of unitary pattern appreciation the term *appraisal* has been permanently replaced by the concept of *appreciation* because of its broader meaning (Cowling, 1997):

It appears that the intent and focus of appraisal is evaluating and estimating. The intent and focus of appreciation is extended and expanded to perceiving, being aware of, sensitive to, and expressing the full force and delicate distinctions of something while sympathetically recognizing its excellence as experienced in gratefulness, enjoyment, and understanding. (p.130)

Unitary pattern appreciation is mentioned as one type of unitary case inquiry (Cowling, 1997, 1998). Other methods include those by Butcher (1998) and Carboni (1995b).

Six orientational features for the unitary appreciation process are implied (Cowling, 1997) and used again in the context of the conceptualization of healing as appreciating wholeness (Cowling, 2000) to “provide the context for establishing an appreciating endeavor with clients or participants” (p.19):

1. *Pattern appreciation seeks a perception of the full force of pattern.*
2. *It requires sensitivity to and sensibility of the manifestations that give identity to each person's unique pattern.*
3. *It involves perception, recognition, and intelligent notice of human expressions that reflect pattern.*
4. *It takes the form of an estimate of unitary energy field pattern as a meaningful representation of the pattern called a profile (often emerges as story, metaphor, and music).*

5. *It implies sympathetic recognition of excellence of energy field pattern meaning that pattern is significant regardless of characteristics.*
6. *It is approached with gratefulness, enjoyment, and understanding that reaching for the essence of pattern has potential for a deepening understanding in service to the individual and knowledge development for practice and science, and ultimately transformation of participants.*
(Cowling, 2000, p.19)

Healing remains an important concept in Cowling's further work. Some minor changes over the years include replacements or extensions of terms, like *practice* extended to *science and practice*, *nurse* replaced by *scientist/practitioner* and *client* replaced by *participant*. These changes seem not very important, but they do show Cowling's constant interest in clarification and deepening ones understanding of the method.

However, there are more extensive changes and additions, like the three critical features; the synoptic, participatory and transformative nature of unitary pattern appreciation (Cowling, 1997).

Those features are also mentioned and further defined in later publications (Cowling, 2000, 2001). Cowling writes about the synoptic nature of pattern appreciation:

The synopsis, which replaces data analysis in conventional research, occurred in the unitary pattern appreciation process by looking at all facets of the data as a unit. (Cowling, 2000, p.28)

The participatory aspect of pattern appreciation is described as shared responsibility with equal participants (Cowling, 1997). All parties involved must be willing to participate freely and openly (Cowling, 2001). It is also very important that all participants have a mutual understanding of the appreciative process (Cowling, 2001). To describe the transformative nature of the unitary appreciative process, Cowling (2001) offers three ways in which the process is potentially transformative (p.36-37):

1. *the way in which it seeks to understand a condition of existence*
2. *the use of pandimensional or unitive consciousness*
3. *the development of one's self as an instrument of appreciation*

The former assumption that the unitary pattern appreciation process is about reaching for the essence (Cowling, 1997) is later relativated and clarified, because the term *essence* could be misinterpreted:

In being unitary pattern-focused, we are reaching for something that cannot be fully captured. Appreciating is the alternative to essentializing. (Cowling, 2004a, p.204)

Four critical dimensions in nursing science are discussed, the tensions between action and theory, sense and soul, stories and numbers, and aesthetic and empiric (Cowling 1999). It is in the same article that the term unitary appreciative inquiry (UAI) appears for the first time.

The four critical dimensions are later broadened by the dimensions of general and particular, and interpretation and emancipation (Cowling, 2001). Nursing requires both, general and particular information for nursing practice. The tension between action and theory is also called the purpose of nursing science (Cowling, 1999):

...shifting from a question of whether a theory corresponds with observed facts to a question of whether a theory offers provocative possibilities for action. (Cowling, 1999, p.133)

The process of appreciative inquiry is one of participatory action and of theory emerging from action. (Cowling, 2001, p.41)

From a unitary perspective, it is evident to pay attention to all phenomena, body, mind, soul and spirit in unity (Cowling, 1999, 2001). Denying some of these aspects leads to an incomplete and only partial picture of human existence. However, a lot of nursing scholarship reflects exactly the same reductionism as in modern science which creates the tension between sense and soul. It is the argument between qualitative and quantitative methods which creates the tension of stories and numbers. Even though it would seem quite logical from a unitary perspective to use stories and numbers equally in critical research, Cowling (1999, 2001) raises questions instead of giving clear answers:

Are there ways in which stories and numbers combined might more fully illustrate the nature of unitary mutual process? (Cowling, 1999, p.134)

All the questions Cowling (1999) raises in context of the dichotomy of stories and numbers include both, stories and numbers and thus he does not seem to favor one or the other. This is unlike Carboni (1995b) who clearly states that only qualitative methods count for the Rogerian researcher.

It is true though, that unique nursing research methods, not only those proposed by Rogerian scholars, are mainly qualitative in nature (Barrett, 1998a, Malinski, 2002), but that does not automatically exclude, deny or reject other scientific approaches or research methods. Research methods, quantitative and qualitative ones, are tools of science and not science itself (Barrett, 1997). Different outcomes from different research methods may add to the understanding of the wholeness of human beings and may count as parts of pattern information, even though parts do not exist in the unitary perspective.

All forms of information are important to the inquirer-participants, and synopsis implies an inclusive view of what counts as pattern information. (Cowling, 2001, p.36)

To a certain extend it is the same tension seen in stories and numbers which is mirrored in the tension of empirics and aesthetics: Cowling (1999) refers to empiric knowing as having an “accent on describing, explaining, and predicting” (p.134). Aesthetic knowing however is derived from action experience and often expressed in art or act (Cowling, 2001). Cowling (1999) concludes that

Unitary pattern appreciation, with its appreciative attitude/pose, transcends the dichotomies of action/theory, sense/soul, stories/numbers and aesthetics/empirics. (p.135)

Eleven elements proposed for a model of pattern appreciation (Cowling, 1997) are partly reused and at the same time differently explicated and renamed as “suggestions for implementing a plan of unitary appreciative inquiry” (Cowling, 2001, p. 38). Those suggestions include form and structure of the inquiry, like dialogue or interview, poetry or drawing or even music and storytelling (Cowling, 2001), documentation of the experience, the perceptions and expressions and the construction of a pattern profile (Cowling, 1997, 2001).

The process is open to all forms of practices and modes of inquiry. Cowling's suggestions for the approach in UAI leave the decisions for form and structure to the scientist/practitioner and the participant(s).

There is another important dimension in UAI; the dimension of power (Cowling, 2004a). Four domains of power are named; the power of knowledge, the power of awareness, the power of cooperation and the power of liberation.

These powers are evident throughout the entire process of the inquiry, including the intent of the inquiry, the design of the inquiry, the discovery and generation of knowledge, and the practices that emerge from the inquiry.
(Cowling, 2004a, p.208)

Cowling (2005) uses the four forms of power again in the context of despairing women and healing outcomes: Here the concepts of power and healing come together and the outcomes are described within the four forms of knowledge (Cowling, 2005). These forms of knowledge are derived from co-operative inquiry as described by Heron & Reason (1997, 2001). Cowling (2005) describes co-operative inquiry as a participatory inquiry perspective "that has informed the development of unitary appreciative nursing" (p.104). Therefore the influence of co-operative inquiry on UAI is explicated more detailed in the next section.

Influence of co-operative inquiry in the development of unitary appreciative inquiry

The influence of co-operative inquiry in Cowling's work is essential. Reason (1994) and the knowledge of participatory inquiry is cited for the first time in the article about healing as appreciating wholeness (Cowling, 2000). Interestingly, in the original article about UAI (Cowling 2001) whether Reason nor Heron are mentioned. Nonetheless they still contributed to Cowling's work in a profound way:

Reason and Heron have extensively contributed to the development of co-operative inquiry in context with a participatory worldview. Both aspects, the co-operative inquiry as well as the participatory worldview, find expression in Cowling's method.

It seems to me to be urgent for the planet and for all her creatures that we discover ways of living in more collaborative relation with each other and with the wider ecology. I see these participative approaches to inquiry and the worldview they foster as part of this quest. (Reason, 1994, p.324)

Co-operative inquiry is a method based on action and reflection. The parties involved are considered being co-researchers as well as co-subjects, as they participate actively in the field which is being researched (Reason, 1994). Heron & Reason (2001) describe four ways of knowing: a) *experiential* knowing, the knowledge occurring in direct face-to-face encounters with persons, places or things through immediate perceiving; b) *practical* knowing, the knowledge demonstrated in skills or competences, combining all the other forms of knowing; c) *propositional* knowing, the knowledge “about” something, expressed in statements and theories; d) *presentational* knowing, knowledge emerged from experiential knowing and expressed in images, dream, story, creative imagination, poetry, music, etc.. Cowling (2004a, 2005, 2006) adopts these forms of knowledge into his own work. The integration of different knowledge levels is one of the aspects essential to the development of his method. The generation of knowledge is evident to the inquiry, knowledge leads to different outcome levels. The knowledge gained does not only help to create pattern profiles, but also to learn from it and to build new strategies as part of the healing outcome.

Unitary appreciative inquiry seeks to develop practical skills to enable individuals to know their life pattern and to use these skills for transforming their lives in meaningful ways. (Cowling, 2004a, p.212)

Cowling (2004a) creates a matrix of interrelationships among the four ways of knowing and the four dimensions of UAI, i.e. pattern, participation, praxis and power, as a guide “for the integration of knowledge and development of the unitary appreciative profile” (p.210). The phases of co-operative inquiry (Reason, 1984) can also be reflected in Cowling’s essential aspects of UAI (Cowling, 2001): The mutual understanding of the process and the willingness to participate freely and openly (Cowling, 2001) can be mirrored in the phase of agreeing on area of inquiry and the phase of initiating actions and recording outcomes (Reason, 1984). The participatory aspect of UAI is clearly mirrored in all phases of co-operative inquiry, especially the phase of becoming fully immersed in the activity and experience.

The quintessential goal of most forms of participatory inquiry, particularly cooperative inquiry, is practical knowledge. (Cowling, 2004a, p.212)

Some of the latest additions to UAI are six strands of inquiry (Cowling, 2006). Three of them, the inquiry strand, the interpersonal strand and the participation strand are also derived from co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001). Like the forms of knowledge, they are another example of the influence of Heron & Reason on UAI. However, those strands, as well as the unitary strand, the appreciative strand and the emancipation strand developed by Cowling, do not add something essentially new to the method. The inquiry strand refers to the initiation of the method of the inquiry and, as well as the participation strand, therefore has a strong focus on the participatory aspects of the method. The participatory aspects are part of the foundation of Cowling's method and are discussed in all articles (Cowling, 1990 – 2007). The interpersonal strand is about creating an open and accepting climate during the inquiry and thus somehow refers to the appreciative aspects of UAI, which are also basic to the method. The unitary strand focuses mainly on multidimensionality (Cowling, 1990, 2001); the appreciative strand relates to the acknowledgment of unique life pattern (Cowling, 1990, 1997, 2000, 2001) and the emancipation strand means the creation of practical knowledge through research (Cowling, 2001, 2004a, 2005).

Most of the theoretical additions to UAI over the years facilitate and broaden the understanding of the method and thus the practical use of it in projects and research. Some of those examples, how UAI has been used in praxis, are listed in the next section.

The unitary appreciative inquiry in praxis

The use of UAI in praxis is important, as the method is meant to be a research and praxis method to improve advanced nursing practice and to facilitate the influence of nursing theory into praxis.

The main focus of inquiry projects by Cowling himself is on experiencing despair (Cowling, 2000, 2004b, 2005, 2006). In the context of the conceptualization of healing as appreciating wholeness (Cowling, 2000), he offers for the first time an example of the pattern appreciation process in a praxis project. The form of the pattern appreciation process described is that of the scientist/practitioner asking the participant questions of experiences, perceptions of the experiences and the ways of expressions. The pattern profile presented is a story written by the scientist/practitioner enriched by music/songs. Cowling (2000) concludes:

The essential features of the process of pattern appreciation are a synoptic stance toward pattern information, a participatory engagement with people in exploration of wholeness, and a transformative process that illuminates the possibilities in wholeness – the embodiment of healing. (p.32)

The form of inquiry presented in a further project by Cowling is that of dialogical interviews (Cowling, 2004b). Out of those projects a healing model for woman in despair has been developed (Cowling, 2006). Through the description of the inquiry process (Cowling, 2000, 2004b), UAI becomes more clear and understandable. Averill (2003) uses the assumptions of UAI (Cowling, 2001) as research design and conceptual foundation of a study focusing on rural elders. Her community-based action research includes interviews, ethnographic observation and review of archival data. The aim of her study is to identify definitions of health, health care perceptions and health care needs for rural elders in a multicultural environment. Talley et al (2005) see UAI as an innovative alternative for community assessment and use the method to create community portraits. With story, poetry, photography and representative foods of an area, nursing students present a unique pattern profile of a community. Alligood (2006) uses UAI as research method in a qualitative study to answer the research question about the life pattern of people with spinal cord injury. Through interviews, three shared pattern manifestations; depersonalization, loss and hopelessness, were found which lead to the concept of despair as the life pattern of people with spinal cord injury.

UAI is not only used as a research method in praxis but also finds expression in literature from a wide range of nursing scholars. Some of those scholars put UAI clearly in context with unique nursing research methods (Fawcett, 2003; Malinski, 2002; Newman, 2002, 2003; Smith, 2002; Todaro, 2003; Wright, 2007).

Unitary appreciative inquiry in the context of unique nursing research methods

The SUHB, in this context considered a nursing theory, as orientation framework of Cowling's method, directs the research process of UAI. This is very important, as it is the interrelatedness between theory and research which adds to the development of theory and helps to avoid potential triviality of either the research process or the theory (Fawcett, 1978). A nursing theory guiding a research process which addresses topics relevant to the discipline of nursing leads to research considered being nursing science (Todaro, 2003). It is the relationship between theory and research which is essential for the advancement of nursing practice. Rogers (1994) is very clear about nursing theories and nursing research; only nursing research derived from nursing theory contributes to nursing science. Cowling's method does that clearly.

Fawcett (2003) interviewed Elizabeth Barrett, Violet Malinski and John Phillips, founders of the Society of Rogerian Scholars, about Martha E. Rogers and her theory: Barrett (cited in Fawcett, 2003) refers to the work of Butcher (1998), Carboni (1995b), Cowling (2001) and Bultemeier (1997) as research methods to be used within the domain of the science of unitary human beings. Malinski adds in the same interview (Fawcett, 2003), that Cowling's (1997) pattern appreciation, together with other practice methodologies (Barrett, 1998b; Butcher, 1998; Carboni, 1995a) should be used to guide nursing practice. Malinski (2002) names Carboni's (1995b), Butcher's (1998) and Cowling's (2001) research methods as "the beginning of what should be a major trend in Rogerian science-based research" (p.16). Also Wright (2007) refers to Cowling's unitary appreciative inquiry method as a practice method based on the SUHB. Newman (2002) presents a thesis "that attention to pattern constitutes the unitary grasp of knowledge the discipline (nursing) seeks" (p.2) and refers to Cowling's (1997, 2001) pattern appreciation process as a way to bring practice, research and theory together. A new realm of nursing knowledge is demanded "that includes and transcends all of the realms that have gone before" and "patterning as the dimension that pulls it all together" (Newman, 2002, p.6). Newman (2003) underlines a thesis of a world of no boundaries in saying that Cowling's UAI is a method with no boundary between research and practice. Cody (1996) warns the

discipline of nursing that “reductionism has come to masquerade as holism” and suggests that “theory development in nursing needs to expand to encompass the simultaneity paradigm” (p.142); he mentions Cowling (1993) amongst others who have started that paradigm shift.

According to a recent online search on scopus.com Cowling’s work (1990 – 2007) has been cited more than thirty times by other authors. However, articles from “Visions – The Journal of Rogerian Nursing Science” are dismissed on Scopus and have been viewed separately. The original article about UAI (Cowling, 2001) has been cited the most, followed by the article about healing as appreciating wholeness (Cowling, 2000), and unitary knowing in nursing practice (Cowling, 1993). The newest articles by Cowling (2006, 2007) have not been cited yet.

Hemsley et al (2006), Zust (2006), Crawford & Reed (2004) and Dudgeon (2002) cite Cowling (2001) very briefly and in a more general way, using Cowling’s work not essentially but as a source of knowledge amongst many others and so does Rawnsley (2000), citing Cowling (1993). This is also true for Whitehead (2003), Johns (2003), Neill (2002) and Davidson (2001), referring to Cowling (2000) and his argumentation around wholeness. Holmes (2002) lists Cowling (2000) amongst other scholars who have used critical research approaches in their work. Turkel & Ray (2000) describe the human science paradigm referring to Cowling (1993, 2000) and others. Mitchell & Cody (2002) briefly refer to the patterns that reflect the whole (Barrett, 1998b, Cowling 1998, 1999). Kruse (1999) mentions unitary philosophy and cites Cowling (1993) in that context. However, some authors cite Cowling more differentiated: Smith (1999) writing about the concept of caring within the conceptual system of the SUHB, refers more extensively to Cowling (1990, 1993, 1997), especially in the context of appreciating pattern. Another broad reference to Cowling (2000) is found in Smith (2002) where Cowling’s method of pattern appreciation is pointed out solely as an example of knowledge development. Gastmans (1998) citing Reed (1996) names Cowling (1993) together with Carper (1978):

It is increasingly being recognized that practice knowledge as well as other patterns of knowing (Carper, 1978; Cowling, 1993) are integral to nursing scholarship. (Reed, 1996, p.32)

Todaro (2003) names UAI as one of the research methods based on Rogers' theory and as a good example of nursing research guided by a nursing theory. Butcher (2006) writes extensively about Cowling (1990, 1993, 1997, 2001), combining Barrett's (1998b) and Cowling's (1997) practice methodologies into one comprehensive model...

...that is an interconnected nexus of Rogerian cosmology, philosophy and science made practical for guiding nursing in both practice and research contexts. (Butcher, 2006, p.9)

In an analysis of qualitative research approaches within the context of the SUHB (Alligood & Fawcett, 2003), Cowling's method (1997, 1998, 2001) is mentioned as an innovative descriptive approach derived directly from the SUHB.

What can be concluded out of all of these citations and the development of UAI as described above?

Conclusions

UAI demands an integral world view and within that offers an approach to all levels of knowing and leads to an understanding of wholeness and uniqueness in a new way! Cowling's method goes beyond the empirical and creates a relationship between participants, environment and health, as it was also the focus in Florence Nightingale's (1859) ideas about nursing (Meleis, 2007). Cowling's method is definitely a unique nursing research and practice method based on the principles and concepts of the SUHB: It is a unique nursing research method because it uses a unique and inclusive approach to the inquiry process. It can also be viewed as a practice method as its usefulness in praxis has been shown in different projects. Because UAI is derived from theory, it contributes to the development of advanced nursing practice. The development of UAI has been a process over many years and still seems to be going on; its theoretical background has been expanded beyond the SUHB, without ever denying the clear orientation on that theory. Redefinitions of terms and internal concepts have been made and still the key postulates and the basic framework remain the same and no internal inconsistencies can be outlined.

However, even though examples of form and structure of UAI are given (Cowling, 2000, 2004b) and suggestions are proposed (Cowling, 1997, 2001), there is a lack of clear definition of the UAI process in praxis. Nevertheless, this can be viewed as a chance; UAI needs no limited or restricted form or structure. Actually, from a unitary perspective, one could argue that any limitation or reductionism could be seen as contraindicated. Cowling describes mainly the framework, the orientation and the overarching process of the method and thus helps to understand the aim and meaning of UAI within the context of the SUHB. In the last couple of years the influence of action research, mainly co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997, 2001) is significant and adds to the integrity and the understanding of Cowling's method. However, the legitimacy and credibility of UAI have not been fully addressed yet (Cowling, 2001), but the extended citation of Cowling's work and the use of UAI by other scholars/scientists show that his work offers a profound body of knowledge. Still, more praxis testing in different settings is demanded to evaluate UAI as a valuable practice method. So far its current use seems slightly limited and focuses mainly on mental issues like despair. Also, it would be interesting to compare UAI with different assessment and/or research methods not related to the SUHB but other nursing theories: Would there be differences in health outcomes for patients? Could UAI be used with people cognitively incapable to participate on a mutual level with the scientist/practitioner, like people with mental disorders or cognitive restrictions? These questions must be left unanswered for now. UAI derived from the SUHB will hopefully be used and further developed in the present and the future to continue its contribution to nursing science and nursing knowledge.

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